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# **The House of Mirth**

by Edith Wharton

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## Introduction

Edith Wharton was born in January 1862, the daughter of George and Lucretia Jones, part of the wealthy Jones family of New York, said to have been the origin of the saying 'keeping up with the Joneses'. The family's wealth had derived from East The House of Mirth (Annotated) Coast industry and banking, built up over the course of the nineteenth century.

It was also a family with a sense of American heritage present, with a family history that claimed three centuries of colonial presence. Included amongst Wharton's ancestors was Major-General Ebenezer Stevens who was at the Boston Tea Party and enjoyed a period of service in the artillery that culminated in him commanding the entire artillery service of the Northern Department. He was present for the surrender of Lord Cornwallis and was one of the first into New York after it was evacuated by the British.

Wharton's childhood The House of Mirth (Annotated) was The House of Mirth (Annotated) a privileged one. In her earliest years, she spent the Winter in New York, the Summer months in Newport, interspersed with visits to other family houses on the Hudson. When the Civil War ended, the family moved to Europe, where they travelled between The House of Mirth (Annotated) Italy, Spain and France, residing for extended period in Rome, Paris and Florence. Time in Europe was foreshortened by another War, the Franco Prussian affair, at which point, the family returned to New York.

While the young girl that would become an author had taken to reading while in Europe, once she was back in America, she established herself in her father's library. By her account it was a limited affair – he was the younger son and had not inherited anything like the quantity of volumes The House of Mirth (Annotated) that his elder brother enjoyed – but he had carefully acquired volumes and these were at her disposal.

As such, the young Wharton took to reading classic histories, poets, philosophers and novelists from England, America and France, her selection limited by what was available, and more importantly by those The House of Mirth (Annotated) authors her mother deemed appropriate. So while The House of Mirth (Annotated) she was able to read Washington Irving and many eighteenth century novelists, others such as Herman Melville and Poe were kept from her on the basis that they The House of Mirth (Annotated) were inappropriate.

By the time that she was introduced into society in 1879 at the age of seventeen, Wharton already had her first volume of poetry printed privately. Whether this was an early indication of talent or her family possessing the means to push what must have been a particular interest is best left open, but it wasn't for another twenty years before the author of those early verses

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began to publish in earnest.

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Six years later, in 1885, she married Edward Wharton, a wealthy Boston banker with roots in Virginia. Together they proceeded to travel through Europe, in part reliving the excitement of her own childhood, but also indulging themselves in the cultural scenery. At one point, the couple spent the equivalent of a year's income on a four month yacht cruise on the Aegean.

In her memoir, *A Backward Glance*, Wharton makes the point that neither of them was in a position to earn the money spent. The Whartons were living off allowances and trust funds emanating from family wealth. Later in the same year, whatever difficulties they might have found themselves The House of Mirth (Annotated) in financially were alleviated when she inherited a sizeable sum from the death of a miserly relative. In short, the Wharton's at this point did not conceive that they should or could earn money by other means.

Even as Wharton's The House of Mirth (Annotated) travels and conspicuous consumption gave her the kind of The House of Mirth (Annotated) experiences that would later be of benefit, they also placed her inside a very selective social set that provided not just useful contacts The House of Mirth (Annotated) but also lasting friendships. Of these, the most noteworthy was the novelist and critic Henry James whom Wharton met socially at dinners arranged early in her marriage. It wasn't until later, when Wharton's range of reading came to his attention, that the two established what would be a lasting relationship.

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